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ABSTRACT

A major purpose of reading evaluation is to help the classroom teacher organize an instructional approach consisting of a closely knit system of skills, experiences, principles, and processes. Reading evaluation should have a three dimensional emphasis. The first dimension should focus on new knowledge uncovered through basic and applied research studies. The second dimension should provide opportunities for teachers to become fully involved in the evaluation process. The third dimension should determine if the breadth, depth, and scope are adequate for present and future needs in reading. Individualized reading instruction demands efficient and effective procedures for the use of classroom teachers in diagnosing reading needs and evaluating reading growth. Instructional technology has facilitated faster and more effective evaluation techniques. (AL)

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BUILDING WORD RECOGNITION ABILITIES

Some teachers may question the necessity for teaching word recognition abilities to children or they may be uncertain about the purposes of such activities. Simply stated, by building word recognition abilities the teacher is helping children become independent readers, and this is part of what reading instruction is all about. Furthermore, the ability to recognize words is crucial to understanding the message the author is trying to convey. And comprehension is also what reading is all about.

Teachers need to explain how to recognize words so that children will be able to read on their own and without help from anyone except perhaps an occasional reference to the dictionary. This is the goal. Teach pupils to recognize words unaided except by the clues available.

This, of course brings up another point to consider: What clues are available? What does the author give as he writes his message. First of all, in our language, the author uses English and that is unfortunate. It is unfortunate because of the ridiculous way we have permitted the various sounds to be spelled. Furthermore, English is probably the most difficult of the alphabetical languages. As a result, children are handicapped from the beginning and they need an inordinate amount of effective instruction (13) in order to overcome the confusions built into the language itself. But English is our language and a solid knowledge of it is an aid to reading.

There are clues that authors build into their writings, clues which can be used by readers to read more or less unaided. One clue is style: If the author writes in a cogent, flowing style, pupils can anticipate which words are likely to come. This leads to the use of context clues. To illustrate:

> Eagerly John and Sue entered the car, fastened their seat belts, and drove rapidly all the way out to the _____ where they were to meet Dad flying in on the noon plane from San Francisco.

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Assuming the reader does not know the word in the blank space but does know the rest he is able to guess at the unknown word because of them. Some words in the sentence help the reader guess at and come up with some notion as to the nature of the unknown word. Terms such as "flying in" and "noon plane" and to a lesser degree "all the way out" (airports are usually outside of town) indicate to the reader that Dad is going to come in on the twelve o'clock flight and they had better drive out to pick him up. So context is a valuable clue to understanding the message and teachers need to teach pupils how to use it. Another clue to word recognition is the use of pictures which accompany the printed text. Sometimes picture clues are valuable aids to understanding and recognizing unknown words. Obviously this depends upon the visual impression made by the picture. Just as obviously, this is a clue which needs to be taught to children in some viable manner so that it is indeed used by readers. (12)

Sheer knowledge of a particular subject is also an important clue to word recognition. (17) Such knowledge is represented by the stock of concepts possessed by the student and this, in turn, is represented by his own vocabulary which is related to the subject. In general, the more he knows the better he is able to read which in turn aids him in obtaining greater knowledge which leads to a larger vocabulary, etc., ad. inf. (16)

But these are end products. The vocabulary-knowledge-vocabulary-knowledge-vocabulary, etc. cycle needs a beginning so let us take a look at that. Where or how does the teacher start the V-K-V cycle?

BACKGROUND

Experience is crucial to learning. Thinking is crucial to learning. Expression is crucial to learning. And this is where the teacher can begin. To initiate the V-K-V cycle, teachers should provide pupils with a wide variety of significant experiences in and out of the classroom. Subsequently, the Language Experience

Approach (8) and the Picture-Vocabulary-Story (12) medium can be utilized. Both media capitalize on the experiential-cognitive-expressive percepts of pupils and enable them to expand their language abilities.

Through first-hand experiences, pupils are brought into physical contact with a particular and selected aspect of the environment. These experiences provide the basis for reaction, appraisal, cognition, perception and above all, discussion. As children discuss their impressions and interpretations of the experience, they share ideas orally, expressed through the use of vocabulary. Experiences then are the precursor of vocabulary development and the more experience-discussion activities the pupil has, the greater is the possibility of his learning more vocabulary. Certainly the potential is there.

The next step is to allow for discussion and writing as well as attendant reading. (8) Through the medium of vocabulary, both oral and written, pupils learn to manipulate ideas, gaining broader insight as they progress. This, in turn, can lead to higher level reasoning with the correspondent use of higher level vocabulary and so on. Once the V-K-V cycle is initiated it can become self-sustaining with proper planning and organization by the teacher. (11) Thus a firm foundation for reading competence is begun.

PROCEDURES

There is, of course, more to building word recognition abilities than may be apparent thus far from the foregoing discussion. A paramount consideration is that of effective teacher action in the classroom. (13) What must the teacher do initially? Is this different from what has already been noted? The answer is yes, of course. In addition to providing experiences and time for discussions so that the V-K-V cycle begins the teacher needs to incorporate other devices for building word recognition skills.

In the beginning, before the formal school experience, children's vocabulary is oral. (15) The transition from oral vocabulary to printed vocabulary needs to be made. The relation between speech and writing needs to be made. The relation between speech and writing needs to be shown and their specific means employed for pupils to attack words. (5)

Typically children's oral vocabulary is much larger than their reading vocabulary. (2) They know and use many more words orally than they do visually. The oral word for "dog" is known, but the printed form "dog" may not be known. Therefore, the teacher has the vital task of aiding students in recognizing the visual-graphic representation of the oral-aural vocabulary understood. (1) Means for decoding the known-unknown is the challenge now faced by the teacher. (6) What bridging tools are required of the reader, beginning, retarded, or reluctant so that he can become independent?

Probably the most valuable initial tool is that of phonic analysis. Another valuable tool is that of word structure analysis. Still others include configuration clues and the use of the dictionary. (6, 8, 9)

Phonic Analysis. The magic of attaching sounds to symbols has advantages as well as drawbacks. One advantage is that the reader can look at a word and if he knows the symbols and can attach the sounds properly, he will be able to pronounce the word. If he pronounces the word correctly and that word is in his vocabulary of understanding, (10) he will be able to make the proper associations and realize that he knows the word. Phonic analysis must be taught because children need to have some initial means of looking at words and pronouncing them. Children need to know that the printed or graphic form on the page has an oral counterpart. The chief advantage of knowing phonic analysis skills is that such knowledge enables the pupil in analyzing print so that he can say or speak what is written.

The major disadvantage is that a reader may be able to orally reproduce the print form, but have no real notion about the meaning of the word. Moreover, many teachers equate glib oral reading with comprehension and err in the extreme. (7, 15, 16) Another disadvantage of phonic analysis is that too much of it causes children to read in a slow-laborious manner and these poor habits remain with them all their lives. (18)

The proper use of phonic analysis as an aid in building word recognition abilities is acceptable instructional practice in the early elementary grades or for those readers who need such skills regardless of grade level. But phonic analysis gradually looses its viability in the middle elementary grades and other word recognition skills need to be proffered. (9) Furthermore, teachers should look to pupil propensity for learning (14) because some children simply do not learn best through phonics methodology. (10) Again other word recognition skills must be taught to help them become independent readers.

Word Structure Analysis. This is another word recognition skill needed by children as they traverse the road to reading independence. It is similar to phonic analysis in that it aids readers in pronouncing the unknown words they meet in their reading. Knowing where words are divided into syllables together with a knowledge of how the syllabic elements are pronounced permits the reader the luxury of continuing on with his reading without having to ask someone else to pronounce the word for him. (19)

There is a pitfall, however, and it is similar to that of word calling in phonic analysis. Just because a reader can analyze a word and pronounce it, does not indicate that he actually comprehends the meaning of the word. The perceptive teacher will not equate word pronunciation with word comprehension. (9) For true comprehension to take place, the reader must have had some significant experience with the word. In addition to this, he must be able to incorporate contextual clue usage as well as the use of picture clues in his efforts to

unlock or decode printed symbols. (5)

If these word recognition abilities do not help the reader, then he must look to the glossary or the dictionary. It may appear that the dictionary is the tool of the last resort, but this is not so. Actually the dictionary should be one of the first devices used, but it does tend to slow reading speed appreciably and that is why the other skills should be utilized initially.

SUMMARY

The present discussion has focused on building word recognition abilities for pupils so that they can become independent readers. The purpose of these skills is to aid children in reading without assistance. They need to know that the author of a selection frequently incorporates some word recognition skills in the material itself. His style may be lucid, allowing the reader to anticipate what is coming. He may provide contextual clues and pricture clues to word recognition. If he does not, then the reader must resort to phonic and word structure analysis in order to pronounce the word and associate it with his own stock or supply of words he already knows. Ultimately, however, the reader may have to use the dictionary. There are so many words in the English language that no one can know all of them.

The teacher's task is clear. Provide the children with many worthwhile experiences in and out of the classroom. Allow time for discussion of the experiences. Start the Vocabulary-Knowledge-Vocabulary cycle and build a firm reading foundation.

Show children the relationship between spoken and printed vocabulary. Explain the use of context and picture clues as well as use of the author's style. Teach them phonic analysis and word structure analysis so they will be able to attach sounds to symbols and pronounce words. Adjust your instruction to suit the learning propensity of the pupils in the class. (13) Discover which ones learn best through auditory methods, visual methods, and kinesthetic methods. (14) Teach them accordingly. When this is done pupils will be better able to read to the maximum of their capabilities.

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